

Pacific Northwest Whole Watershed Restoration Venture Partnership Proposal to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Goals: Focus collaborative funding to accelerate completion of whole watershed restoration in priority basins and to recover key habitats for Pacific salmon and trout in Oregon and Washington.

Overview: Leverage OWEB funds (\$500,000 per year for 3 years) with Forest Service Venture Fund grant (approximately \$300,000 per year for three years) plus funding from other partners and stakeholders to accelerate completion of highest priority work in focus watersheds (to be determined). Participating agencies and non-governmental organizations include Ecotrust, Wolfree, Oregon Trout, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and BLM (other potential partners include NOAA, USFWS and SRFBD.) Grant funds would be awarded to and administered by Ecotrust, who is facilitating the process for selection of watersheds and projects by Venture Fund participants. Ecotrust will market the work of the partnership to recruit new members and produce annual accomplishment reports.

Background: For the past two decades the US Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region (“the Region”), along with many partners, has implemented a large, comprehensive watershed restoration program to benefit aquatic resources, particularly Pacific salmon, native trout and water quality. After nearly ten years of implementation, the most efficient approach, resulting in the greatest resource benefits, is to work collaboratively to focus and integrate treatments for priority watersheds. This work is done by cooperatively identifying focus watersheds and applying treatments that address core problems. This approach integrates landscape-scale treatments, and sets these watersheds on a trajectory for natural recovery of aquatic resources and watershed conditions. Over 20 examples of this “whole watershed restoration” have been completed to date in the Region. A recent publication “Ridge Top to Valley Bottom, Restoring Whole Watersheds” summarizes these accomplishments.

The Region is committed to expand these accomplishments. This Venture fund is an exciting new partnership for collaborative action in priority basins. In FY 05, a pilot effort was initiated, with \$240,000 of Forest Service funding applied in the States of Oregon and Washington. In Oregon, \$150,000 of in-kind and matching FS funds were leveraged with \$224,000 from OWEB and OR Trout to complete high priority work in the Middle Fork John Day, North Fork Umpqua, Alsea and Sandy River sub-basins. Based on the initial success of this program, the Forest Service is expanding its investment in FY 06, combined with partner resources to provide “venture capital” for investment in restoration of important watersheds. It appears to be an excellent time to continue and expand OWEB/FS cooperation in the program. This funding is seed money applied to high visibility projects, which is then locally leveraged to expand accomplishments and ownership. The specific objective is to accelerate the rate of completion of active restoration in priority watersheds, currently estimated at about 2 watersheds per year within the Region.

Methodology: Using a peer-reviewed priority setting process, focus basins (3rd Field HUCs) have been identified for active restoration emphasis. In Oregon, these include the John Day, Lower Columbia, Rogue/Umpqua, and Mid and North Coast (process available on request.). Discussions indicate these priorities match well with others’ involved in Regional and state-wide restoration. Forest Service “basin stewards” are working with local partners, State and Federal agencies and Tribal governments to complete initial selection of priority watersheds for

collaborative action. Each basin partner group will submit recommendations for focus watershed(s), and begin identifying a program of priority work, based on watershed analysis, designed to promote processes needed for watershed and aquatic riparian recovery. Basin partner groups will leverage any “Venture funds” received with local resources to accomplish needed work.

The Region is well-suited to help facilitate this work, with a decade of experience in watershed analysis/diagnosis, restoration project design/implementation and monitoring. Forest Service staff have provided technical support for many of the watershed councils in OR/WA for years, and are an active part of the network of partners needed to efficiently complete prioritization and action planning for this effort. The Region has developed an interdisciplinary Design Assistance Team of highly-skilled Forest staff to aid in the development of watershed treatment strategies, and the design and implementation of a wide range of treatments. The result is a program of work that addresses core problems, not symptoms, and results in multiple resource benefits for stream and aquatic ecosystems. Treatments address the whole watershed and include activities such as road improvements and/or decommissioning, riparian planting/thinning, fish passage improvements, and in-channel treatments.

Final Product: This approach will focus cooperative actions to recover watersheds/habitat supporting listed Pacific salmon and native trout. Collaborative decision-making on priority watersheds will enhance the treatment and completion of restoration on a subset of the highest-value salmonid streams in Oregon. Specific outputs of this program are dependent on the watersheds and action plans submitted by each of the basin groups. Priority work in one or more focus watersheds should be completed during the grant period.

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PNW Whole Watershed Restoration Joint Venture: Implementation 2006

Working together to select and complete priority restoration work on whole watersheds is the focus of this Joint Venture. This program is committed to making a difference on the ground. To accomplish this, a growing list of partners is collaborating to improve focus and provide seed money to support implementation of important restoration projects. These projects are part of multi-year plans to complete the highest priority work on watersheds of mutual interest, with high opportunity and ecological values.

A starting point for the program is an initial identification of relative restoration priorities for river basins (3rd field HUCs) in Oregon and Washington. This was done using a peer reviewed process for setting ecological restoration priorities. Other important considerations, including ongoing/potential partnerships, the effective leveraging of funds, skills/capacity to design and complete a full range of restoration treatments, etc, then provide a working framework for river basin priorities. In Oregon, these include the John Day, Lower Columbia, Rogue/Umpqua, and Mid/North Coast.

At the basin level, Forest Service “basin stewards” have worked with local partners, State and Federal agencies and Tribal governments to select initial priority watersheds for collaborative action. Each basin partner group will recommend a focus watershed(s), and identify a program of priority work (based on watershed analysis) designed to promote processes needed for watershed and aquatic riparian recovery. Joint Venture funding is intended to be applied primarily to proposals developed from these action plans.

Although this framework is designed to help focus restoration work, it is clear that every basin has important watersheds with strong ongoing partnerships with priority work to complete. Recognizing this, proposals from any basin and watershed will be considered.

An initial set of proposals has been solicited from all National Forests and their watershed partners. By mid-March, a review panel convened by Ecotrust and composed of representatives from Trout Unlimited, USFWS, OWEB, BLM and USFS will rank proposals. Criteria for rating proposals incorporate current OWEB evaluation elements. For the Joint Venture, these include the following considerations:

- Whether the project is the product of a watershed analysis, recovery, and/or formal action plan.
- The presence of clearly stated objectives and identified, quantifiable results.
- The relative magnitude of ecological benefits (# species, area of habitat improved).
- The number and diversity of partnerships.
- The degree of leveraged funding.
- Readiness for implementation.
- A clearly articulated approach for monitoring project implementation and effectiveness.
- The basin and watershed priority (within priority river basin and/or priority watershed from recovery plans).

Joint Venture funding for selected projects would be awarded by Ecotrust to project implementation leads (either USFS or partner organizations such as watershed councils, SWCDs). Ecotrust will monitor and report individual project outputs annually to all project partners, meeting all OWEB reporting requirements. A final report, displaying Joint Venture outcomes, will be prepared and distributed to partners at the end of the three year period.